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ABSTRACT

Forces which have influenced the shifting of moral foundations and their potential influence on the field of education are explained in this paper. Two categories of systems--soft and hard--are reviewed. A system 'hardens' when the emphasis on the application of a technique becomes more important than serving the purposes for which the technique was created. For educators, the art and skills of teaching should serve society. Techniques can be improved; but as these are defined and they increase in proficiency, they must not become more central than the purpose and the people they are designed to serve. 'Soft' systems constitute a more compatible environment for moral education. The personal freedom they offer and the individual responsibility they demand seem more vital to humanity's well-being than the much heralded fruits of 'hard' systems such as predictability, demonstrable outcomes, and time-cost efficiency factors. This article presents a historical review of the systems approach, its development from soft to hard systems, and the implications for moral education. (KWL)

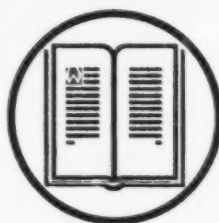
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Editorial Comments

The College of Education at Brigham Young University is excited about its new venture into the realm of publishing scholarly material. The College has wanted to develop a publication such as this *Review* for some time, and now the first step has been taken. Our intent is to provide a vehicle in which scholarly work reflecting not only the secular trends of the educational world but those of a religious point of view can be found. Hopefully, this *Review* will always contain articles by professionals in the field of education that have as their focus both secular and religious points of view.

Contents of the *Review* are solicited from the educational community in general. Potential articles are reviewed by an editorial board composed of members of the College of Education plus selected professionals representing the broad expanses of the field of education. It is anticipated that the *Review* will be published by the college on a semiannual or annual basis in a format similar to this initial publication.

The Editorial Board wishes to thank the contributors to this first edition and also recognizes the College of Education for its support and direction. We invite all those who are interested in submitting scholarly work for consideration in future editions to do so.

Cregg F. Ingram
Editor

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Systems, Professionalism, and Morality in Education

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Quietly diffused among the roots of most contemporary social issues is the spectre of moral agency. Numerous analysts engaged in exploring the ebb and flow of various social currents either build or conclude their impressive descriptions with observations related to this theme. Irving Kristol, for example, has noted that institutions in our society have come to operate on principles different from those which have traditionally shaped the private moral codes that govern individual life.¹ Similarly, a team of scholars at Stanford University recently completed several years of research and introduced the report of their findings with this statement:

"This study will show that society in the United States ignores individual ethical instruction . . . It is the author's belief that the United States—especially in this century—has emphasized the importance of social ethics at the expense of individual ethics."²

The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the forces which seem to have influenced the shifting of moral foundations and consider their potential influence on the field of education.

A Systems-Oriented Society

During World War II the British developed what they called a "systems approach" to deal with logistics problems. The idea was borrowed by American industry during the postwar period and eventually introduced in the federal government in the early 1960s. The capabilities and increasing availability of the computer made this approach to administration very popular. Planning, program, and budgeting systems (PPBS) of various kinds evolved. Program evaluation review techniques (PERT) were a natural corollary. During the past decade the pendulum swing has moved across the product-oriented market into the service-oriented industries, including education. The dollar squeeze of the late 1960s made the systems concepts attractive instruments for educational administrators, who were coming under the gun of accountability. These ideas were also adopted by various groups interested in social research.

The basic outcome of the systems approach orientation has been an increased emphasis on explicit, objective-oriented, outcome-tested programs. This point of view fits hand in glove with the profit-motivated and behaviorally oriented psychological milieu of our twentieth-century Western society. A cluster of mechanistically controllable concepts have emerged and been widely distributed on the premise that they were defensible in terms of tangible, demonstrable evidence. "Research study," with its scientific, tested, statistically significant overtones, has become a magical phrase. Hard data, program planning management by objective, systems analysis, behavioral objectives, process control,

interfaces, cost/benefits, cost/effectiveness, simulation, accountability, input/output, performance criterion, and a host of similar terms constitute the fashionable language of the times. It is in this immediate context that we pursue our respective educational endeavors.

I would like to back away somewhat from this detail and sketch a larger but more profile-like image of the subject. A profile, as I understand it, is the form of some subject as seen from a particular position or perspective against the light. It is a profile that I wish to call attention to in this paper, the profile of the environment that is created by systems and structures that evolve around systems.

Pondering Definitions

In Webster's unabridged dictionary, one finds more than a dozen applications of the term *system*. Several of these appear in the smaller New Collegiate version. I feel quite comfortable with most of these descriptions. Phrases such as "a unified whole," "an organized procedure," "an harmonious arrangement or pattern" come across soft and sensible to me. But another feeling crops up when I read this: "*an organized set of doctrines, ideas, or principles usually intended to explain the arrangement or working of a systematic whole.*" Somehow those words travel with flags of warning across my mind. In the world in which we live and work, there are many systems. To me these systems appear to be characterized by distinctions that place them in one of two general categories. I call these soft and hard systems. It may be more accurate to think of a continuum rather than categories, but the idea of difference is essential.

A Systems Law

It has been my observation that whenever a soft system—namely, some organized mechanism, technique, or pattern of service—begins to exhibit or elicit a doctrinal explanation intended to set forth the arrangement or working of a systematic whole, it simultaneously shifts its highest priority from service to self-perpetuation. In other words, when regulations designed to protect the system begin to develop, the priorities associated with the use of that system begin to change. As this occurs a soft system becomes a hard system, and its survival becomes more important than the purpose it was created to serve. This phenomenon occurs with theories, committees, agencies, legislative programs, auxiliaries, bureaus—in short, with nearly any type of organized system. For me it has become a Flinder's law: *When soft systems become hard systems, their survival becomes more important than their service.* Consider, if you will, this idea in relationship to the nature of professionalism. Professions are very closely associated with systems—soft and hard.

Origin of Modern Professionalism³

Historically, the priest was the prototype of our

modern professional. Vested with religious authority and working within the framework of the church, he was viewed as judge, healer, teacher, and minister.

Eventually, developments related to medicine, education, and law resulted in these fields disengaging themselves from the church and its theological world views. Following this lead, other artisans and tradesmen, such as architects and engineers, subsequently organized themselves into so-called professions.

For these nonpriesthood practitioners, the secular guild replaced the sacred brotherhood, and efforts were made to justify the existence of these budding professions with definitions of authority not related to God or the church; theory dethroned theology, and rigorous experiment replaced religious ritual.

These emerging professions differentiated themselves from each other. But following the priestly pattern, they tended to create special structures in which to practice their arts and skills. Just as the clergy had built their houses of worship, so the medical practitioners created their hospitals, the lawyers their courts, and the educators their schools.

Advent of Specialization

As these professions became entrenched in society, emphasis was placed on refining their techniques. The emphasis on refinement of technique resulted in specialization. No longer were there just medical doctors; there were pediatricians, internists, gynecologists, etc. No longer were there just educators; there were specialists in elementary, secondary, and college instruction. No longer were there just lawyers; there were tax lawyers, defense lawyers, patent lawyers, etc. No longer were there just engineers; there were structural engineers, electrical engineers, chemical engineers, etc.

Emphasis on Technique and Delimitation of Responsibility

With the advent of such specialization, technique came to dominate and shape the idea of a profession. The emphasis on technique resulted in a subtle but significant shift in the definition of a profession. The earlier view that a professional was one who professed a faith, who engendered and proclaimed a confidence in responding to some broad aspect of human need, rapidly subsided. In its place arose a much narrower view wherein professionals began to define themselves as practitioners of particular techniques in response to a specific need. They continued to make their living from the art and skills they professed, but the definition of the context in which they assumed responsibility shrank considerably and became less related to the total life of their clients.

For example, in medicine there appeared an impersonal air that reflected the fashionable narrower definition. It was not Mrs. Brown in room 21, but the

infected liver in room 21, or the enlarged heart in room 16, or the collapsed lung in room 38, and so forth. People were viewed as objects upon which specialties and techniques associated with those specialties could be applied. A soft system was beginning to harden.

Erosion of Empathy

Doctors who defined themselves as podiatrists refused to assume responsibility for treating digestive tract disorders. Brain surgeons did not deliver babies, and obstetricians did not set broken arms. The ultrarefinement of technique severely restricted the range of felt responsibility. For many patients and clients, empathy seemed to be squeezed right out of the professional's role. Those who sought these professional services faced increasing frustration as they attempted to seek solutions to their problems. As referrals between the respective specialists increased, so did costs and difficulties in communication. It became unethical for one practitioner to acknowledge any weaknesses or limitations in the performance of his colleagues.

Remuneration Based on Applying Technique Rather Than on Client Satisfaction

The lawyer's case, the doctor's diagnosis and treatment, the architect's design, the engineer's project, the planner's strategy became isolated islands. These islands consistently decreased in size and expanded in numbers. The developing system divided up the workload and multiplied the workers and the fees. One consequence of the decentralization of responsibility was that the professions effectively demanded they be evaluated and rewarded on the basis of applied technique rather than on successful response to a particular problem. One must pay the bill whether his case is won or lost, whether he lives or dies, whether his problem is successfully solved or not. The criterion for determining client indebtedness was now almost solely based on the application of the professional's technique. If he applies his technique, the client must pay, regardless of outcome.

Creation of Artificial Environments

The hardening agent that eventually transforms soft systems into hard systems is the creation of an artificial environment via eliciting or articulating organized sets of doctrines that explain the arrangement or workings acceptable to that particular system. In the case of medicine and law these doctrines have now been institutionalized and are protected by legislative enactments. The effect is to create an artificial environment that guarantees the success and continuation of the profession.

It is through the creation of a legally sanctioned artificial environment, in which the professional's skills and procedures can be demonstrated and proven effective, that the legitimacy of a professional is safeguarded. The actual skills and procedures of a

professional can be called first-order techniques.⁴ Equally crucial, however, is the system that evolves around these techniques—the artificial environment that prescribes their use and availability. It is this system that the profession uses to create its behavioral world—a world that is designed to define the application of the techniques as failsafe. This becomes another reason for requiring payment for applying the techniques rather than for solving the client's problem. Eventually the artificial environment can establish itself as more basic than the practitioners it was created to serve. Doctors who require hospitals to heal the sick become obsolete without hospitals. Lawyers who require courtrooms to administer justice become obsolete without courtrooms. Teachers who require specially prepared schools and curriculum to teach the truth become obsolete without specially prepared schools and curriculum. In effect, what happens is that the hard system emerges in the form that makes expendable all within it except those who submit to its doctrines.

Brief Recap

The problem described in the foregoing historical review is, in summary, this: The emphasis on the application of the technique becomes more important than serving the purposes for which the technique was created. For example, health becomes less central in medicine, truth becomes less central in education, justice becomes less central in law, and utility and function become less central in architecture.

Hardened systems tend to require that the doctor, educator, lawyer, architect, etc., define client needs more in terms of what his techniques enable him to provide than in terms of what his clients actually need. Vanity and selfishness find a real nesting place in hard systems. People are used to serve and perpetuate the professions rather than the professions being used to serve and perpetuate the people.

Benefits vs. Liabilities of a Profession

Some of the very desirable benefits associated with soft-system professionalism, such as improved quality of performance, reliability of technique, and availability of service, are apparent. I think we all desire such benefits and the good they add to our lives. But it seems equally obvious that these positive factors are not dependent upon the vain and self-serving aspects that characterize the hard systems enveloping some modern professions. The major reason for these negative developments in a profession appears to be the excessive entrenchment of the artificial environment—the hardened system. Where this occurs, the doctrines of the profession seem to manipulate unduly the larger cultural environment from which the profession derives its support. Negative consequences seem to multiply.

For example, in our society the medical profession has hardened to such an extent that the legal and

economic structure of American society are now largely shaped to preserve and serve that profession—even to the point that our federal government is considering absorbing it in order to preserve the economic strength of the nation. This has already happened in Britain and other countries. In collaboration with a subsidiary profession, insurance, the social structure has been designed to remove most of the economic risk from practitioners in the field of medicine. It is my understanding that 90 percent of all hospital bills are currently paid by a third party. When the doctor doesn't worry about costs and the patient doesn't worry about costs, economic morality disappears. The conglomerate cluster of related fields, such as pharmaceuticals, medical laboratories, nursing, etc., have created an alliance that lives comfortably in the controlling system of this artificial environment that surrounds the medical profession. Similar circumstances in varying degrees exist regarding the legal profession, mortuary science, engineering, and education.

One challenge our society faces is determining how much protection is too much protection for a profession's techniques. There certainly needs to be a reasonable balance of control. The danger lies in wanting so badly the good things a profession can offer that a subsidized, guaranteed security is provided. Apparently, we are now struggling with that very problem in education.

Creating a "Safe" Profession

As stated previously, when a profession feels an overabundance of security due to the hardening of its systems, weaknesses in the profession's character seem to proliferate, much as undue affluence seems to damage individual character. The appetites in both instances lose the benefit of reasonable control. When one demand is met, others burst forth. As is characteristic of personal appetites, lasting satiation is impossible. When one set of expectations is fulfilled, the appetite merely changes the form and nature of its demands. The most viable remedy for this condition is discipline, and it seems much easier to develop discipline in a soft system than in a hardened one. Without individual self-control there is no such condition as a "safe" system.

Educators still have the opportunity to develop a "safe" profession, although it seems to be quickly eroding. The challenge, it seems, is to actually profess and to give that profession a mature expression without demanding a subsidized environment that tends to destroy humility and unduly increase the demands for security. The art and skills to serve society as an educator are available. The techniques can be improved. As these techniques are defined and proficiency in them increases, they must not become more central than the purpose and the people they were designed to serve. They must not be allowed to harden. This need not prevent their devel-

opment and use, but it would undoubtedly demand a shift in philosophical emphasis. Soft systems do not provide and/or demand self-perpetuating philosophical definitions; hard systems do.

First Symptom of Hardening

The first stage of hardening a system occurs in the minds of its practitioners. When practitioners become technique-oriented in their thinking; when they develop a systems mentality and their own language to express it; when they become preoccupied with the cleverness and ingenuity of how they are doing what they are doing, then the stage is set. A teacher suffering from this syndrome begins to lose touch with students because his or her resources are being controlled and consumed by techniques—the techniques become ends rather than means. Students are seen as objects that vindicate the application and manipulation of the techniques rather than techniques being considered tools that are helpful in serving the students. Such teachers tend to become caretakers of the system rather than caretakers of the students.

What I am suggesting is that, over the long haul, the apparent ineffectiveness and less prescriptive and predictive nature of a soft system seems more desirable than the apparent explicit, predictable guarantees of a hardened system that demands a doctrinal context in which the application of its techniques can be tacitly defined as infallible. The difference is freedom, and the issue is morality.

Implications for Moral Education

If I read the literature correctly, the number one issue in education today is morality. Finance and its regulation is the major administrative concern, but I hear numerous people suggesting that if educators do not find a way to put morality back in the schools, finance will be futile. This brings us face to face with the issue of hard and soft systems.

To me, morality is more pervasive and fundamental than techniques or systems. Temporal techniques and systems should be subject to morality. Morality should not be determined by nor become subject to such techniques and systems. This is a reasonable condition to maintain in an environment of soft systems. It is a very difficult posture to retain in an environment of hard systems. The more the system hardens in a democratic and pluralistic society, the less room there will be in that system for moral viability. Hard systems elicit and demand their own doctrines of self-preservation and perpetuation. They create and become laws unto themselves. As evidenced by the callous cruelty of fascist Germany, there is a tendency to deny all morality except that which serves the system. Hard systems are programmed so their demand to be served has a higher priority than their obligation to serve. The only safe hard system is the ultimate perfect system that circumscribes all truth

in faultless propriety or a subsystem that will fit perfectly into that perfect system. Any hard system that is otherwise is an antagonist.

Modern educational practice has been and continues to be threatened by soft systems that strain to become hardened. Although some of these aspiring systems have succeeded in articulating doctrines that have partially and temporarily controlled the educational environment, such as Darwinian evolution, psychological behaviorism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and logical positivism, the pluralistic and diffused nature of the educational enterprise has avoided becoming totally subject to a unified hardening system. Whether it can continue to do so remains to be seen. The full results of the current thrust of philosophical unionism with its press for a management-labor relationship between school boards and the education labor force are not yet clear; nor is the impact of the "input-black box-output" formula for organizing and operating the educational enterprise.

The conclusion of this paper is that the softer we keep the systems in education, and the less we allow them to elicit or proclaim doctrines that dictate arrangements and prescribe explanations that control the entire educational environment, the better off we are likely to be. Soft systems constitute a more compatible environment for moral education. The personal freedom they offer and the individual responsibility they demand seem more vital to man's eternal well-being than the much heralded fruits of hard systems such as predictability, demonstrable outcomes, and time-cost efficiency factors.

Note: Determining the hardness or softness of a system can be accomplished through the application of a "Profile Scale" that has been developed by Dr. Flinders. Those wishing a copy of this profile can request it from him directly: Dr. Neil Flinders, 227A MCKB, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602.

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5. Reported in the *Provo Daily Herald*, 11 Nov. 1976.
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